

Mother by teej_318

Series: Prompts - April 2021 [3]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Byers Family Supremacy, Canon Compliant, El just needs a hug, Hopeful Ending, Hopper's not dead just chillin in Russia, How is that not already a tag lmao, Jonathan and Will Byers are amazing brothers, Joyce Byers is an amazing mom, Mike Wheeler is a good friend, Set in Season 3, Starcourt Mall aftermath, byeler if you squint

Language: English

Characters: Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper (mentioned), Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers & Joyce Byers & Will Byers & Eleven | Jane Hopper, Joyce Byers & Eleven | Jane Hopper, Will Byers & Eleven | Jane Hopper, Will Byers & Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

Following the events of Starcourt Mall, El goes home with the Byers family. She wakes up in a panic and Joyce is there to comfort her.

Mother

Joyce held on to Will tightly as they both cried in the parking lot of Starcourt Mall. The Mind Flayer was dead, it seemed, which meant that it was likely all over. When Joyce opened her eyes after clearing them of tears, she noticed El watching her and Will with a confused expression on her face. Joyce broke the hug with Will and whispered to him that she'd be right back.

El was glancing over Joyce's shoulder, searching for a sign of Hopper. As she continued looking for Hopper, El's facial expression fell and now she looked scared out of her wits. El locked eyes with Joyce again, who was looking at El with a blank expression on her face. The tears came immediately as El realized what had happened.

Joyce reached El and pulled her into a hug as El started to sob. She held onto El gently, trying to be as comforting as possible as El sobbed uncontrollably. Within minutes, both Jonathan and Will had hurried over and joined the hug as well. The four of them held on to each other for several moments while the rest of their friends reunited with their families as well.

It was some time before they broke the group hug. By the end of it, El had pretty much cried out all of her tears and coupled with the exhaustion from the fight in the mall, she was nearly passed out when they broke the hug.

"What...what happened?" El asked as she tried to catch her breath again.

"I'm sorry, sweetie, but I just don't know," Joyce replied. "I was firing up the machine to close the gate and he was fighting near it. By the time the fight was over, it was too late for him to get out of there. He nodded at me to do it. I didn't want to, but I knew I had no choice. He just disappeared in the blast wave."

At this, Joyce started to break down as well. El pulled her into another hug and held onto her tightly. Joyce sobbed into El's shoulder for a few moments before they broke apart again.

"I'm sorry," Joyce said, her voice shaky now. "I didn't want to do it, but then I looked Hopper in the eyes and he and I both knew the same thing: I had to do it then or never. I feel terrible."

"You did what you had to do," El said, trying to sound strong despite the way she felt and how she just wanted to crumble.

Joyce nodded and gave El another hug. Just then, Mike walked up to the rest of the Byers family, his face full of concern.

"What happened in there?" he demanded. "And where's Hopper?"

El looked away from Mike, unable to answer him as more tears threatened to spill out of her eyes. Joyce pulled her in for another hug and held onto her while Mike looked to Will and Jonathan for an answer.

"He, um...." Jonathan stammered, unable to get the words out.

"He's gone," Will whispered.

Mike's eyes widened and his face softened.

"Oh my god," he said in a quiet voice. "You mean he's...?"

Will nodded and Mike looked beside himself with guilt.

"El, I'm so sorry," Mike said, unable to find the right thing to say. "I'm just gonna give you guys some space."

Before he left, Mike turned and pulled Will into a quick hug. He held onto Will tightly for a few seconds before he walked away without another word. Will looked confused by Mike's action, but didn't have time to think about it, as some of the Army guys who had shown up were motioning for everyone to leave the mall.

Jonathan and Will helped El and Joyce out of the parking lot and to the Byers' station wagon. Joyce and El sat in the backseat, both of them still holding onto each other while Jonathan sat in the driver's seat and Will rode shotgun. Jonathan drove them away from the mall as fast as he could, knowing how much they needed to get away from the mall and back home.

When Jonathan finally pulled the car up to the house and turned off the engine, El looked up, frowning at seeing the Byers home.

"What are we doing here?" El asked. "Don't you have to take me back to the cabin?"

"El, don't be silly," Will said. "We're not gonna leave you there by yourself."

"You're gonna stay with us," Jonathan added. "You still need a family to take care of you, El. That doesn't change just cause Hopper's..."

As Jonathan's voice awkwardly trailed off, El turned to Joyce.

"Are you sure?" she whispered.

"Honey, you're not a burden just because you need somewhere to stay and to be cared for," Joyce said. "We're gonna take care of you from now on. I promise you that you'll be safe with us."

"But what about...?" El started before Joyce cut her off.

"No 'buts'" Joyce said. "We're gonna figure everything out together, as a family. For now, let's just get inside and get cleaned up and off to bed."

Within half an hour, El had showered and changed into some borrowed sleep clothing that Jonathan and Will had both outgrown. Will had offered to sleep on the couch so that El could take his bed for the night and before El could protest, Will had already camped out on the couch and fallen asleep. El sat down on Will's bed, trying to process everything that had happened during the night. She looked over at the clock on Will's nightstand. It was 3:15 in the morning.

El startled when she heard a knock on the bedroom door. She looked up and saw Joyce walking into the room, dressed in a bathrobe and with a towel wrapped around her head to dry her hair.

"Hi sweetie, just checking in before I head off to bed, you all okay in here?" Joyce asked.

El nodded, feeling a little overwhelmed by the kindness extended by

the Byers family.

"Do you want me to stay in here until you fall asleep?" Joyce asked kindly.

"Yes please," El said, finally feeling comfortable enough to just lay down and go to sleep.

Almost as soon as El's head hit the pillow, she fell into a deep sleep. But it was restful. Instead, she dreamed of nothing but Hopper and The Mind Flayer. Over and over, she saw the Mind Flayer attack Hopper and she could do nothing to stop it. She screamed and she screamed and she screamed. But it was all to no avail. Nothing she could do could stop Hopper from meeting his fate repeatedly.

El woke up screaming and crying uncontrollably. She wouldn't have been surprised if she woke up the whole house with how loud she had screamed. She sat up in the bed, curling her knees to her chest and starting to rock on top of the bed. El closed her eyes and tried to shut out the thoughts, but it was to no avail.

Soon, El felt the bed dip slightly and she opened her eyes to see Joyce sitting on the bed, looking at her with sympathy in her eyes.

El burst into more tears as she latched onto Joyce and hugged her tightly. Joyce was hugging her back just as tightly and El clung to Joyce like she was a lifeline. Joyce whispered words of comfort into El's ears as she held onto her and El cried out all of her tears. Joyce rubbed circles on El's back in an attempt to calm her down.

"Can you hear me, El?" Joyce asked after El had stopped crying.

"Yes," El breathed back.

"I need you to breathe with me, okay?" Joyce asked. "It'll help calm you down and maybe let you go back to sleep. I'm not going anywhere, okay?"

"Promise?" El asked.

"Yes, I promise, sweetie," Joyce said. "Now, breathe with me, okay? Breathe in."

The two of them breathed in together before Joyce told El to breathe out. They repeated the process for several moments as El calmed down from the panic attack. Soon, her breathing had returned to normal and she felt a calm she hadn't felt in years.

"You're gonna be okay, sweetie, I promise," Joyce said. "Hopper might not be here, but I promise you that I will be here. No matter what, I'm going to take care of you and make sure that you're okay."

El nodded as she felt her eyes getting heavy again. She was a little nervous about going back to sleep, but she felt safe with Joyce holding onto her. Joyce gently guided El back to the pillow, while also laying down next to her.

"I'll be here all night long, El," Joyce said. "I just need you to get some sleep, okay honey?"

"Okay," El whispered back, barely able to keep her eyes open.

"Just rest, El," Joyce said. "Everything will be okay."

El felt herself drifting off to sleep again. As she did, she realized she had found something she didn't even know she was looking for: a mother. El smiled at the thought as she fell asleep again, held safe in Joyce's arms, knowing she was loved.

Author's Note:

Thank you to an anonymous user on Tumblr for requesting this fic! I absolutely loved writing this fic and I'm glad to share it with you all!

I've got some more fic requests waiting to be written; I'll be getting to them soon!